



Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission

204 East Academy St. ♦ P.O. Box 771 ♦ Asheboro, North Carolina 27204

November 3, 2008

The Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission (HLPC) met in the County Commissioners Meeting Room of the County Office Building at 725 McDowell Road, Asheboro, NC, on Monday, November 3, 2008. The purpose of this meeting was to hold the commission's first public hearing for a landmark designation.

Chairman Johnson welcomed everyone and thanked the Randolph County Board of Commissioners for allowing the public hearing to be held during their regular monthly meeting. Chairman Johnson then called the meeting to order at 5:08 p.m. Members present were Hal Johnson, Fran Andrews, Bill Johnson, Warren Dixon, Mac Whatley, Lynne Qualls, and Robyn Hankins. Robby Davis was absent.

Comments from Chairman Johnson and Power Point Presentation

Chairman Johnson stated that he was glad that the Commission's first designation is the 1909 Courthouse and that it seems fitting that in June of 1908, there was a public hearing held for the proposal of building a new courthouse. Now, 100 years later, the first Historic Landmark Preservation Commission is honoring this landmark and its significance to the county and the county's history.

Chairman Johnson said that State regulations require that before a local government can designate a local historic landmark, it first must have established a Historic Preservation Commission. Through interlocal agreements, the Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission can also serve as the advisory body to the governing board of the participating municipality. Chairman Johnson informed the Commissioners that as of this date the governing boards of Asheboro, Ramseur, Liberty, Trinity, and Franklinville have signed agreements recognizing the HLPC as their own.

Chairman Johnson presented copies of the application documentation that were sent to the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, State Historic Preservation Office in Raleigh after the Randolph County Commissioners requested the designation of the 1909 Courthouse. Chairman Johnson stated that the State Historic Preservation Office had advised that pictures should be taken of the inside of a proposed landmark, regardless of whether only the exterior is to be designated. He also noted that pictures should be maintained that show the area context of the landmark and should note the specific criteria outlined in the Ordinance that the proposed landmark meets. Chairman Johnson informed the Randolph County Commissioners that the Historic Landmark designation application was reviewed in Raleigh, and they concur that it does meet all the requirements for designation. Chairman Johnson stated that today's public hearing brings us to next step in the process. He then asked Mr. Whatley to narrate the Power Point presentation which included pictures supporting the documentation on the 1909 Courthouse.

During the Power Point presentation, Mr. Whatley reviewed the historical highlights which were included with the application, as follows:

At the July 1, 1907 meeting of the Randolph County Board of Commissioners there was a lengthy discussion of the need for a larger, more conveniently located building for the County offices.

Commissioners J.W. Cox, H.G. Lassiter and Chairman Arch N. Bulla of Randleman were then meeting in the 6th Randolph County Courthouse, built in 1839 at the intersection of Salisbury and Main Streets in Asheboro. That brick structure had been built by construction superintendent (and future Governor) Jonathan Worth, and expanded in 1876, but it had lost its place as the focal point of Asheboro almost 20 years before. With the completion of the High Point, Randleman, Asheboro and Southern Railroad on July 1, 1889, the village had begun a gradual migration of businesses and services from the 1792 Courthouse center toward the Sunset Avenue railroad stations.

The commissioners considered and deferred further public decisions until November 4, 1907, when they paid \$300 to the Charlotte firm of Wheeler, Runge and Dickey for copies of the plans and specifications of their Iredell County Courthouse design. Oliver D. Wheeler and his various partners ultimately built eight courthouses similar or identical to Randolph's, of which six remain in existence today. The Iredell Courthouse (1899) was the first of these, followed by Scotland County (1901), Ashe, Stokes, Wilkes and Watauga Counties (all 1904), Randolph (1909) and Avery (1912). In December, Chairman Bulla was reimbursed \$18 expense money for travelling to Statesville to inspect the Iredell County offices.

There was evidently considerable public concern being expressed about relocating the courthouse, with some opposing any move away from the historic town center, and others wanting it rebuilt adjacent to the railroad tracks. The topic was discussed in February, and again in March, 1908, with no decision other than to pay 75 cents to give the old courthouse a thorough cleaning. In April, twenty-eight of the leading citizens of Asheboro decided to break the commissioners' deadlock by offering \$2,600 to purchase the old courthouse and public square at Main and Salisbury, together with the jail property at the southeast corner of Salisbury and Cox, on the condition that the county begin to build a new courthouse by July on property belonging to Col. A.C. McAlister. The stated desire of the citizens was "that a new, commodious and up-to-date, modern courthouse with fireproof vaults for the protection of the records of the county be erected at a convenient and desirable location." That location was McAlister's barnyard and pasture on Worth Street, known locally as "the windmill property" because McAlister had a "pump tower and power house" located there. McAlister had agreed to sell for \$3,400, with the contract being held by D.B. McCrary as Trustee for the anticipated sale to the county.

Taken together, the contracts gave the commissioners an opportunity to relocate the courthouse to the new site at a net expense of \$800. In May, the Commissioners set a public hearing on the proposal, and in June, 1908, they found that "the erection of a courthouse suitable to the needs of the county and the board... is desirable in the interests of the county and its people." To sweeten the deal even further, a group of lawyers interested in relocating their practices from the so-called "Lawyer's Row" on the northwest corner of the old Public Square agreed to buy the western 40 feet of the McAlister property from the County to build new lawyer's offices. Their purchase price of \$1,300 meant that the County had made \$500 on the property transfer before construction even began.

The optimistic board originally "proposed to use the county convict force to make the brick and let out the masonry and woodwork to contractors." Less than a month later, on July 6, 1908, Joseph R. Owen of Randleman was hired to supervise construction at a wage of \$22.50 per week. The Commissioners retained the right "...to discharge Owen at any time if his work or conduct in connection therewith be unsatisfactory to the board." It appears that the board had no plans for financing construction other than paying out of general revenue, and this rather quickly proved expensive. In September, the payroll for work on the new courthouse was \$1,616.17. In October, stone work cost \$223.57. In November, "boarding carpenters" cost \$12.00 and Glenola Brick Works billed \$1,082.00 for 168,812 bricks, only a fraction of the million bricks which they would ultimately

supply. Even more expensive were the 700,000 yellow hydraulic-pressed “Washington” exterior face bricks shipped via railcar from Ohio, invoiced at \$70 per thousand.

1908 was an election year, and the escalating cost of the new courthouse became a campaign issue. W.J. Armfield, Jr., the young High Point native who had moved to Asheboro in 1898 to start the Bank of Randolph, campaigned as a commissioner candidate who could find a means of financing construction. In November, Armfield replaced H.G. Lassiter on the board and was elected Vice Chairman; J.W. Cox replaced Arch Bulla as Chairman, and the board immediately took steps to cut costs. Owen was fired, with the basement walls just waist high, and the commissioners began to oversee the job themselves. M. M. Allred of Randleman was hired as carpenter foreman; Ed Frazier as bricklayer foreman. After consultation with High Point builder Dennis Hall, the entrance hall’s tile floor was replaced with bare concrete, and other changes were made to lessen expenses. By May, 1909, work had advanced to the point where the County was advertising in the Greensboro newspapers for bids for plastering the interior. One last casualty of the construction period was former Chairman Arch Bulla, who resigned from the board and was replaced by R.L. Coltrane of New Market in May.

To finance construction, \$15,000 was borrowed from Armfield’s bank; his son recalled that “the only thing he wanted is that it be recorded in the minutes and the clerk, or person with authority, sign a note.” Commissioner minutes show that the County also borrowed money from a number of individual citizens at six per cent interest for varying periods of time, in order to complete construction. In the final analysis, the total cost to Randolph County of about \$34,000 compares favorably with the price range of the seven similar courthouses, which ranged from \$20,000 (Ashe County) to \$74,000 (Stokes County).

Work was completed and County offices began to move in preparation for the first term of court, set to begin July 19th. On July 12, 1909, the commissioners’ minutes noted:

“It is a matter of satisfaction to the commissioners that the County officers are domiciled in their respective offices in the new courthouse... which is adequate in its accommodations and furnishes ample room and comfort to those in attendance.”

The 1839 courthouse was demolished and its bricks used to build a new county jail in the rear of the building in 1914; a county agricultural building and health department headquarters were later added to the complex. A sizeable addition for the register of deeds and clerk of court was built in 1950 at a cost of \$100,000; it provided offices for the Clerk of Court, Register of Deeds, Tax Department, and County School Board. In 1975, the annex was remodeled to provide additional courtroom space, and it was expanded again in 1979 to provide space for two more courtrooms and an even larger Register of Deeds. In 1998, planning began for the eighth Randolph County Courthouse, and after that structure opened in July 2002, the 1914 jail and the 1950 courthouse annex was demolished. As part of the new construction, the 1909 courthouse received a new roof and exterior paint job in 2001, but was mothballed, awaiting future renovation, once court activities moved to the 2002 building.

Architectural Analysis of the 1909 Courthouse:

The courthouse design combines the complex, flamboyant massing of nineteenth-century Victorianism with the motifs of American Beaux-Arts classicism. The form of the 1909 building is reminiscent of the neighborhood of “American Foursquare” homes along nearby Worth Street—boxy two-story cubes with hipped roofs. The brick facades of the building rise from a roughly-hewn granite base. Round arched windows on each side define the courtroom on the second floor level; the windows of the southern (Worth Street) façade feature elaborate molded terra lintels in a variety of shapes and sizes. The complex textures of materials such as tile, rough granite, sandstone, brick, wood and metal are combined with bold ornamental shapes to create the active, highly plastic surface of the building.

The two-story main block is covered by a square hipped-roof, lit by attic dormer windows, and topped by a powerful Second Empire cupola covered by a ribbed copper dome. Massive columns with Corinthian terra cotta capitals support an elaborate pediment where a pressed-tin bearded male face of indeterminate mythological significance broods at the local Confederate Monument.

The portico shelters the entrance into a rectangular vestibule flanked by stairs. Much of the original interior finish has survived the extensive alterations; original staircases, vertical panel wainscot, flat panel doors and spittoons can be seen in the first floor cross hall. The plan and functional uses of the building were “in every way a duplicate of the Iredell courthouse.” Entering from Worth Street, the offices of the Clerk of Superior Court were first on the left, and those of the Register of Deeds first on the right. Adjoining the Clerk’s office were separate rooms for the Solicitor and the Grand Jury; adjoining the Registry was the Commissioner’s meeting room. Beyond the east-west cross hall was the Sheriff’s Office on the left, and the Treasurer’s Office on the right. Both the Clerk’s office and the Registry featured large fireproof vaults, with additional vaults below in the basement. The southwest basement vault was given over to historical record storage and became the domain of Miss Laura Worth, county historian. After construction of the annex, the function of the original offices changed, with the Estates Division taking over the former Registry, the Law Library and District Attorney taking over the former Sheriff’s office. The Treasurer’s Office became the County Finance and Accounting office, with additional space devoted to the NC Department of Revenue and the Highway Patrol.

On the second floor was the courtroom, with pew-style benches seating some 200 people. Behind the courtroom were private rooms for the Judge, the Jury, prisoners and witnesses. The interior was rather plain, with a wooden chair rail below the window sills, and plain plaster walls above. The finest feature of the courtroom was its pressed tin ceiling, where a cornice of acanthus or tobacco leaves surrounded the room, with patterned tiles divided into large panels by decorated ceiling joists. A balcony or “gallery” provided additional theater-style seating, originally meant for segregated Negro defendants and spectators.

The courtroom was completely remodeled in 1966 by the local architectural firm of J. Hyatt Hammond and Associates. The gallery was closed off at that time and transformed into offices for the county manager, county planner and a meeting space for the commissioners. Public toilets were created in the basement in the 1940s, but the 1966 renovation added two more in the courtroom, as well as three private ones for the judge, jury and solicitor. The original wooden rear stairs were also removed in that renovation and replaced by a narrow set of steel steps wrapping around a phone booth-sized elevator. The building’s first air conditioning system was also added in 1966.

Chairman Johnson opened the public hearing and the floor for comments. No one spoke in favor or opposition, and the hearing was closed. Chairman Johnson asked for a motion on the resolution of support.

On a motion of Whatley, seconded by Andrews, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the request for local landmark designation and the resolution of support for the City of Asheboro’s designation of the historic Courthouse as a historic landmark, as follows:

***Resolution Recommending Local Historic Landmark Designation
1909 Randolph County Courthouse (#7)***

WHEREAS, Chapter 160A, Article 19, Part 3C of the North Carolina General Statutes provides for the designation of local historic landmarks; and

WHEREAS, the Randolph County Board of Commissioners has appointed the Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission and provided opportunities for municipalities within Randolph County, through an interlocal agreement, to designate the Commission as a joint historic preservation commission, having the authority to exercise, within the planning jurisdiction of the municipalities, all powers and duties given it by the Randolph County Historic Preservation Ordinance; and

WHEREAS, the City of Asheboro and the County of Randolph have entered into such an interlocal agreement; and

WHEREAS, the Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission has taken into consideration all information contained in the Historic Landmark Designation Application for the exterior of the 1909 Randolph County Courthouse (the county's seventh courthouse) requested and filed by the Randolph County Board of Commissioners on September 27, 2008; and

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, State Historic Preservation Office, has reviewed the Local Landmark Application and noted that the exterior of the 1909 Randolph County Courthouse possesses the requisite historical and architectural significance and integrity required for local landmark designation; and

WHEREAS, the Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission conducted the required public hearing, having published legal notices with mailings to adjoining property owners; and

WHEREAS, the 1909 Randolph County Courthouse (#7) was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 10, 1979; and was a significant building in the growth and development of the City of Asheboro and the County of Randolph; and

WHEREAS, the Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission finds that the 1909 Randolph County Courthouse meets the following specific criteria outlined in the adopting Ordinance establishing the Commission: (1) Critical part of the county's heritage by having value as an example of the cultural, economic, historic, and social heritage of Randolph County; (2) Exemplification of an architectural type distinguished by overall quality of design, detail, materials, and craftsmanship; (3) The location of the 1909 Courthouse provides a unique and distinctive structure representing an established and familiar visual presence in the City of Asheboro and Randolph County; and

WHEREAS, the property is more specifically described as follows:

That portion of Randolph County property located at 145 Worth Street, PIN# 775183717, Asheboro North Carolina, where was constructed the 1909 Randolph County Courthouse (#7); and as conveyed on June 9, 1908, by A.G. McAlister and wife, Addie, to the Randolph County Board of Commissioners, as follows:

Beginning at an iron pipe on the north side of Worth Street and running thence North 79 degrees; east with said Worth Street 158 feet to an iron pipe; thence North 11 degrees East 250 feet to an iron pipe; thence South 79 degrees West 158 feet to iron pipe; thence South 11 degrees West 102 feet to an iron pipe on the South side of a 16 feet alley; thence South 11 degrees West 148 feet to the beginning containing, more or less, 39,500 square feet, as also referenced in Deed Book 131 Deed Page 79, as merged on February 8, 1990.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, this 3rd day of November, 2008, that the Randolph County Historic Landmark Preservation Commission approves the request for local landmark designation, and recommends to the City Council of the City of Asheboro, North Carolina, that the 1909 Courthouse be designated as a Local Historic Landmark.

Adopted this 3rd day of November, 2008.

Chairman Johnson concluded by stating that the final authority for local landmark designation rests with the elected officials of the local government within whose planning jurisdiction the landmark is located. Being that the 1909 Courthouse is in the City of Asheboro jurisdiction the recommendation will be forwarded to the Asheboro City Council. Chairman Johnson said that a public hearing has been set for Thursday, December 4, at 7:00 p.m., at the Asheboro City Hall.

Adjournment

On a motion of Whatley, seconded by Andrews, the commission voted unanimously to adjourn at 5:45 p.m.

Hal Johnson, Chairman

Amanda W. Varner
Clerk, Randolph County HLPC